

Training School Governing Body Members in Three Rural Schools in Taung: Empowerment for Good Governance

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ABSTRACT The advent of democracy in 1994 brought democratic institutions and practices to all spheres of the South African society. Education in particular has since then experienced tremendous transformation. The South African Schools' Act of 1996 for example makes provision for the establishment of democratic School Governing Bodies for all public schools in the country. Prior to 1994, principals and chiefs of rural communities handpicked school council members. The South African Schools' Act (1996) therefore democratized school governance by giving schools back to the communities and making it mandatory for parents to serve on school governing bodies. The governing bodies are responsible for school governance issues and to support school principals and their management teams for the realization of quality education. As former teachers in rural schools these researchers have observed that School Governing Bodies in rural areas face many challenges. Since the realisation of educational goals depends very much on good governance and leadership the researchers selected three schools in the Greater Taung Area Project Office for pilot training. The researchers assumed that the training of the school governing body members in rural schools could reduce the challenges and empower them to be good governors.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of democracy in 1994 brought democratic institutions and practices to all aspects of the South African society. The education environment in particular has since the democratic dispensation experienced tremendous transformation. In line with democratic principles the government enacted a law to make it mandatory for all stakeholders, particularly parents, to be involved in the governance of schools. The enactment of the South African Schools' Act (SASA) of 1996 for example made provision for the establishment of democratic School Governing Bodies for all public schools in the country. Clarke (2009) notes that SASA deals with the piece of legislation that is most relevant to members of school governing bodies. Prior to 1994, principals and chiefs of rural communities handpicked school council members. Apart from being undemocratic, people who were close to the learners and thus had vested interest in children's education were not necessarily given the opportunity to serve on the handpicked school council members. The South African Schools' Act (Republic of South Africa 1996) therefore democratized school governance by giving schools back to the communities and making it mandatory for parents to serve on school governing bodies. The govern-

ing bodies are responsible for school governance issues and to support school principals and their management teams for the realization of quality education. Clarke (2009) asserts that school governing body members are expected to provide the principal with sound advice and guidance on issues that can improve the smooth running of the school. Clarke notes however that the professional management of the school is the responsibility of the principal. Despite this noble idea, a number of problems arise in most rural schools which might hinder good governance. As former teachers of some of the high schools in the rural community of Taung these researchers have observed that the major challenges plaguing schools in the rural areas in terms of governance include: the lack of understanding of the role of school governors, illiteracy, interference in management functions and lack of basic budgeting and policy making skills among the democratically elected school governors. Since the realisation of educational goals depends very much on good governance and leadership the authors selected three schools for a pilot training. This study was based on the assumption that the training of school governing body members (SGBs) in the rural schools can make elected governors understand their roles, reduce the challenges they face in discharging duties and make rural schools more functional.

A Brief History of School Governance in South Africa

During the apartheid era the school councils and committees were not democratically elected. Mabasa and Themane (2002) assert that the school committee structures did not advocate for broader stakeholder participation and was dominated by school heads who reported directly to government bureaucracy (in some instances to politicians) responsible for education. They add that stakeholders took initiatives as part of the broader political struggle for an all inclusive system which led to the establishment of Parent-Teachers-Students (PTSAs) associations. The new dispensation through the South African Schools' Act (1996) made provision for the establishment of School Governing Bodies to address the problem. Mabasa and Themane (2002) note that the establishment of SGBs was to engrain a new ethos for school governance taking into account the long entrenched history of undemocratic and exclusive practices in the school environment. In effect the establishment of SGBs was an attempt by the state to identify the major stakeholders in education and give them the chance to play roles in the school system to ensure that their interests are catered for and also to ensure that schools run effectively. As Quan-Baffour (2006) intimates, 'to develop education for democracy, we need to develop democratic education to teach about democracy. Our education system as a whole must practice democracy'.

Problem Statement

Education is one of the key tools for the development of individuals, communities and nations at large. In the knowledge and skills economy, without education it is difficult to get decent employment. In view of large number of uneducated people in South Africa, the country faces lots of socio-economic challenges such as high rate of unemployment, illiteracy, low skill levels, crime and the increasing levels of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. It is believed that well educated citizens will be in the position to overcome most of these problems. To realise the goals of education, all the key stakeholders - school management teams (i.e. principal and heads of department), educators, parents, learners, support staff- have to

play their part. In recent times many public schools in the country, especially in the rural areas, have become dysfunctional because of mismanagement. Such schools are characterised with poor results, vandalism and indiscipline among both educators and learners. Some SGB members might interfere in school management due to lack of the knowledge of their role as governors and this can have negative effect on teaching and learning. It is assumed that the inability of some SGBs to perform their supporting and governance roles emanate from the fact that some of the members lack education, expertise, skills and training to perform their roles effectively. The question that emanates from the problem for the study can therefore be stated as follows:

What kind of knowledge and skills do SGB members need to empower them to effectively discharge their duties as school governors?

Objectives of the Study

- The main objectives of the study were to
- ♦ identify the training needs of SGB members
 - ♦ provide SGB members with specific training to empower them to play their governance roles and
 - ♦ evaluate the impact of the training on the roles of the school governors.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the stakeholder theory which was propounded by Freeman in 1963 (Freeman 1984). The theory descriptively states that managers who wish to maximize their firms' potential will have to take the broader interest of all stakeholders into account. From a normative and analytical perspective, the stakeholder approach can assist managers by providing analysis of how the company fits into its larger environment, how its standard operating procedures affect stakeholders within the company (employees, managers, stockholders) and immediately beyond the company (customers, suppliers, financiers). Stakeholders are defined as "those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist". Freeman (1984) cited by Lewis (2006) defines a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives." Lewis adds that the definition of stakeholders

can be viewed from two angles – strategic and moral. The strategic stakeholders are those who can affect the firm which calls for their interests to be “dealt with” to enable the organisation/firm to achieve its stated objectives.

Citing Freeman (1984), Lewis (2006) points out that the moral stakeholder is the one who is affected by the firm and who stakeholder theorists seek some form of consideration or alignment. Before the stakeholder approach became popular, economist saw profit for the owners as the only interest of a business. Friedman (1970) for example indicated that the only social responsibility of corporations is to provide profit for its owners. On the other hand Quezada (2012) asserts that one aspect that influences stakeholder identification is the manner in which the analysis is shaped by an organisation’s approach to social responsibility, which requires that stakeholders be placed at the centre of an institution’s management practices. This view of the stakeholders is wider than the narrow views of earlier economists who only looked at the (bottom line) profit. Of late the concept of triple bottom line incorporates issues around the environment, social and economic. Triple bottom line is interpreted in sectoral (development, agriculture, fisheries, industry etc.) and dimensional (environment, social, economic) contexts within different jurisdictions (Potts 2004). In effect, the era in which businesses looked at profit alone is past and gone as businesses, private sector organisations and government institutions are increasingly being called upon to take the interests of their stakeholders into account in all their operations. This theory refers mainly to business but the world has changed a lot and all organizations are increasingly being called upon by stakeholders for their interests to be taken into account which has been proven to be in a business’s own interest to ensure its long term sustainability.

The theory is useful and applicable to matters of school governance and school effectiveness in the South African context. The school as an organization has many stakeholders whose actions impact on the school. The South Schools Act (1996) provides for the establishment of SGBs in all state schools to support the school management and deal with governance issues. Before the new dispensation in 1994 school councils were arbitrarily chosen and their roles not well defined. Lewis and Naidoo (2004) note that

school governance is narrowly defined as it stresses the aspect of participation for efficiency purposes and to a large extent rather than for democratic purposes. In this paper the authors try to apply the stakeholder theory to address the challenges SGB members as important stakeholders face to enable them to effectively play the roles they are expected to play by law due to the lack of the needed insight, skills and training. The training is a way of empowering SGBs as major stakeholders to ensure proper participation in the democratic process of stakeholders and ensuring effectiveness of schools.

School Governing Body Members and Expectations from Them

The stakeholders who serve on the SGBs are the principal (ex-officio member), parents (representatives of parents form the majority of 50% plus one additional member, educators (representatives), non-educator staff (representative), learners’ representatives (in case of a high school). All these stakeholders may have different interest in the school but section 20 (1) (a) of SASA (1996) states clearly that the SGB of a public school must promote the best interest of the children and the school. The introduction of SGBs is an attempt to democratize and ensure the broader participation by all the relevant stakeholders. Karlsson (2002) intimates that the intended role of SGBs as stipulated by the SASA 1996 is to democratize the school culture which was an attempt to address issues relating to the autocratic and undemocratic socio-political system that traversed all sectors of the society. The other intended roles of the SGBs are to ensure the representation of various constituencies in a school community and the democratization of schooling based on the core values of democracy which are:

- ♦ representation of all stakeholders
- ♦ participating actively and responsibly
- ♦ tolerance
- ♦ rational discussion, and
- ♦ collective decision making (Karlsson 2002)

These values and culture are essential for the SGB to the school management for the realization of educational goals. Some of the support the SGB can offer the school may be financial, logistics, expertise, and voluntary labour. The National Department of Education (1996) indicates that national and provincial policy

should allow for the fact that such capacities [support for core values] may be underdeveloped in many communities and therefore need to be built. The SGBs have specific roles to perform. Karlsson (2002) sums up the mandatory and overarching roles of SGBs as adopting a constitution, developing a mission statement, adopting a code of conduct for learners, supporting staff in the performance of their professional functions, determining times for the school day, making recommendations for the appointment of staff, administration and control of school property. The SGBs should also encourage volunteerism among community members to serve the school and the use of its facilities for educational programmes. Sections 36, 37, 38, 41 and 43 of the Act give SGBs the responsibilities on school funding, keeping of financial records as well as auditing and reporting procedures (Karlsson 2002).

The SGB concept is very new to the education terrain in South Africa and most governors might face the challenge of not knowing their role or what is expected of them. The functions, roles, responsibilities and activities are quite complex and this could make some influential people within the education system take advantage and manipulate them for their own selfish ends. The findings that 'SADTU has influenced the appointments of some senior education officials' in most provinces in South Africa is a case in point, (City Press, 27/04/14) issue. A situation like this makes it crucial to train SGB members in order to empower them to meet the expectations of education stakeholders. Heystek (2003) intimates that parents of former model C schools have powerful governing bodies to manage their schools because of the vast levels of skills and experiences of most of the parents as against parents of black schools who most often have little education and no experience in management to enable them to effectively participate in school governance. Although the public expects good results from the school, lack of knowledge and experience in school governance on the part of most SGB members could be a serious hindrance to school effectiveness.

Citing Potgieter et al. (1997), Maile (2002) asserts that school governance is an act of determining policy and rules by which a school is to be organised and controlled. Maile adds that school governance includes ensuring that such

rules and policies are carried out in terms of the law and the budget of the school.

There is a problem with overlap sometimes between the roles of management and governance although section 16 of the SASA (1996) describes two separate activities with the two teams responsible for each of the activities. Heystek (2003) notes that the daily professional management activities of the school are the responsibility of the principal and staff whereas the SGB is responsible for the governance of the school. The functions of the principal and the school management team (SMT) are clearly stated in the Personnel Administration Measures of 1999 (PAM) (Govinasamy 2009). There are however some grey areas of responsibilities that overlap between the roles and responsibilities of the principal and the SGBs. For example the PAM document states that the principal must keep the school account and records and make best use of funds to benefit all learners. SASA 1996 however stipulates that the SGB must open and maintain a bank account and keep record of funds received and spent. Such seemingly contradictory stipulations could create management and governance problems because the roles seem to overlap and sometimes create confusion between the two structures in the schools. Clarke (2009) for example supports the view that the financial management of the school is the ultimate responsibility of the SGB which can delegate it to the principal. The functions of the principal, among others, according to Clark (2009) include the submission of annual academic performance of the school and the effective use of the available resources which includes money that is not under his responsibility. There is therefore the need for the law to be clear about whose responsibility it is to keep and manage the accounts of schools. As it stands now the principal is the accounting officer for the funds of the school but the act also gives SGBs responsibility and control of the same funds.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a qualitative research which took the form of a case study. The case study involved an in-depth study of three purposively selected schools in the Greater Taung Municipality in the North West Province. In the words of Yin (1984) a case study research is an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon

within its real-life content when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Creswell et al. (2012) attest that from an interpretivist perspective case studies strive towards a comprehensive (holistic) understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon under study. Case studies offer a multi-perspective analysis in which the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of one or two participants in a situation, but also the views of other relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them (Creswell et al. 2012).

In this case study the researchers used focus group discussions to collect data because that approach allowed them to see the investigation from the perspective of the interviewee (King 2004). The use of the qualitative method in the form of a case study was important for this study because it enabled the researchers to do an in-depth study of the SGB structure. It also allowed the participants to recount their lived experiences as school governors. Bryman and Bell (2011) posit that most qualitative researchers express their commitment to viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the subjects that they are studying. The social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on their social world (Bryman and Bell 2011).

Selection of Schools and Participants

In the early part of 2011 the researchers made a private visit to the district education office where they met one circuit education official. The informal conversation that ensued made the researchers aware of the challenges facing the governors of the schools under the official's supervision. A month later the circuit officer invited the researchers to one of his monthly meetings with the principals of the 6 secondary schools under his supervision. He introduced them to the principals and requested the researchers who are experienced in school management to assist the SGBs to function properly. In order to understand the challenges facing the SGBs, the researchers undertook a needs analysis of the of the school governors of the

six schools. Although all the SGBs of the six schools had challenges three of them were almost dysfunctional because of serious issues regarding the understanding and interpretation of government legislation regarding the SGB concept, policy, discipline and management of finances. Consequently the three schools were purposively selected for training in order to empower the SGBs to function properly. As Schumacher and McMillan (1989) affirm, a case study does not necessarily mean that one site only is studied. Two training sessions (which lasted for 2 days) were organized in July 2011 for the three schools. These were followed by another two day sessions in September 2011. The training sessions focused on the issues of governors' role, policy implementation, discipline of students and the management of school finances. Thirty SGB members from the three schools (10 participants per school) took part in the training sessions that took place at the Assembly of God's Church, a venue which was accessible to all the participants.

Data Collection

Data collection was done through the training of the school governing body members of the participating schools. The first session of the training focused on the SGB legislation and policy related matters while the last session covered the issues of student discipline and management of school finances. After each training session the participants were interviewed in smaller groups (of 10 people per group) to find out the extent to which they felt the training was empowering them to discharge their mandate as school governors. Citing Heunis (1981) Welman, Kruger and Mitchel (2006) point out that it is important that when time and money are invested in training needs; training interventions are not launched without the necessary evaluation. Flippo (1981) adds that the only answer to the evaluation of management courses lies in the scientific evaluation of training results.

In this case study the interviews focused on how the SGB members perceived their role, interpreted policies, managed school finances and dealt with discipline issues among students. Permission was sought from the participants and the focus group interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Reflective notes were also made during the interview sessions. The interview

sessions lasted for about 1 hour for each of the three SGB groups. The tapes were replayed by the researchers and the transcripts amended in relation to the responses that were inaudible which enabled them to reflect on the contents of the interviews. Three months later the researchers visited the three schools to evaluate the performance of the school governors. In doing so they interviewed the three principal (who are ex-officio members of the SGBs), their deputies and the chair persons of the SGBs of the participating schools. This was done to find out how the school managers perceived the work of the school governors after receiving the training.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The paper explored the value of training as an empowerment tool to enable SGB members to play their roles as effective governors of rural schools for the achievement of educational goals. The following four themes on the roles and responsibilities therefore came out of the data analysis:

- ♦ Governance roles
- ♦ School policies
- ♦ Discipline
- ♦ Finance

Theme 1: Governance Role of SGB Members

The interviews with the SGB members revealed that some of them were confused about their roles and functions. After the two training sessions all the SGB members indicated that they were beginning to understand their roles and responsibilities as school governors. The evaluation of the training showed that most of the members were now able to discuss some of their roles and procedures that should be followed when dealing with the issues of discipline, finance, policies etc. When asked what they think is their role as parents a forty-two [42] year old nurse had this to say

all the conflicts between us and the principal could have been prevented if we had been trained on our governance roles. I now agree that we were stepping off our mark by interfering in the professional management of the school.

The above response affirms that some of the SGB members are beginning to realise what is expected of them instead of crossing the line

and locking horns with the school principal. This is a positive development because as the SGB members become more aware of their roles, conflict between them and the school management team can reduce and that may enable them work as a team to support the principal and his/her management team in order to make the school functional.

When asked what they understood as their role, the SGB members mentioned the following:

- ♦ administering and controlling school property
- ♦ dealing with the issues of admission
- ♦ drawing a code of conduct and language policy for the school
- ♦ maintenance of school buildings and determining the budget and school fees
- ♦ recommendation of appointment of teachers
- ♦ engaging in fund raising and assisting the SMT to draw school budget.

Being able to talk about their roles indicate that the SGB members are now aware of their roles in the school system.

Theme 2: Formulating and Implementing School Policies

One of the major responsibilities of the school governing body members is to formulate and implement school policies on admission, curriculum, discipline school times etc. In a break away session the SGB members were requested to formulate policy on school times for their respective schools in line with the 7 hours per day stipulated by the department of education for their schools. The trainers acted as facilitators for this session. In a report back it was observed that one of the school's policy on school times stated 7:30 am- 2:30 pm while the other two included in their policies 8am- 3pm. During the report back each school justified the reason for the chosen times. As one of the chair persons put it

Children are often late for school because there is no policy to monitor lateness and absenteeism. Now that we know that our school starts at 8am and ends at 3pm we will be in better position to assist teachers in checking learners who come late or loiter around during teaching hours.

The above response does not only indicate awareness of their responsibility as school counsellors but also the expectations of the entire

community regarding how they assist the school to enforce learner attendance and punctuality. The SGB members have now realised that the responsibility of educating children does not lie only on teachers. After all as the African adage goes, 'it takes a whole village to bring up a child'.

Theme 3: Managing Discipline

With the coming into force of the South African Schools' Act (SASA 1996) corporal punishment has been abolished in schools and alternative ways and means need to be found to check indiscipline among the learners in schools. It is the responsibility of each SGB to formulate a policy that could assist the school to control and minimise misconduct among learners. Thus the policy on discipline should provide teachers and indeed the schools with guidelines on how to deal with cases such as rape, pregnancy, assault, fighting, carrying of drugs, weapons, taking alcohol, smoking etc. During this section of brainstorming and drafting of policy on indiscipline, the school governors realised the limit of their powers and the importance of policy guidelines in taking appropriate action against learners who get involved in misconducts. As one parent member conceded how his school SGB nearly expelled a learner who bullied and assaulted a junior by saying

We nearly got ourselves into trouble by expelling a learner by just listening to the principal. I now know that we are not allowed by the law to do that without looking at what the policy guidelines say.

One learners' representative members also said

Some of us [learners] think we can do whatever we like as the teachers cannot beat us anymore. We now understand that the SGB can recommend actions which can be more severe than beating.

Theme 4: Budgeting and Fund Raising

Finance is very important in an organisation such as the school where basic but important teaching resources such as chalk, dusters, registers and other teaching aids must be bought. In view of the importance of funds one of the training sessions focused on school finance - fund raising, budgeting and management of school finance etc. The evaluation of the ses-

sion revealed that prior to the workshop most of the SGB members had no idea of what school budget was and how to prepare it. However the training empowered the participants to draft a budget for each of the schools for the trainers to evaluate. The participants reported that they did not know that drawing a budget for the school was part of their responsibilities neither did they know how to do it. As one unemployed member who is a house wife affirmed

This is a good learning session for us. For me apart from being able to contribute to making a budget for the school, I can now apply what is learnt here at the workshop to my domestic matters when I need to do a budget for my family

The response above which were echoed by most of the SGB members indicates the realisation of an important responsibility as school governors. This realisation, if backed by action and commitment can go a long way to improve the financial position of the respective schools. After three month the subsequent evaluation which involved the school principals, their deputies, SGB chair persons and secretaries revealed that there has been some vast improvement in the way the SGBs in the three schools operated because they had been empowered through training.

CONCLUSION

The training and its subsequent evaluation revealed that most SGBs members in the rural areas do not understand their role as school governors. Based on the findings discussed above the paper concludes that to be able to discharge their duties well as elected representatives of key stakeholders in education and to make schools functional SGB members need to be empowered through workshops.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the above findings the following recommendations were made to the department of education; that:

- i. for school governance to become more effective frequent continuous training programmes should be organized for SGBs to equip them with relevant knowledge and skills to play their roles more effectively.

- ii. training workshops should be conducted for all new members who join the SGBs.
- iii. provision should be made for knowledgeable and experienced community members in the rural areas with no children in the school to serve as SGB members in order for the school make use of their expertise.
- iv. Schools in the rural areas should engage in more fund raising activities to improve the finances of the schools to enable them function better.

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